

THE THIRD GHALLUGHARA: ON THE SIKH DILEMMA SINCE 1984

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This article examines the enduring impact of 1984 tragedy upon the Sikh community. After outlining the initial reaction to the Government of India's army action in the Golden Temple Amritsar, it looks at some of the ways common Sikhs made sense of the loss of the Sikh heritage and the hurt of desecration of their holiest shrine. While the Indian stately discourse enforced by the media tried to justify its ghastly action, this was challenged, by a section of the Sikh elite. Even after three decades the reverberations of the tragedy seem unending, reminding Sikhs individually as well as collectively about the precarious public space available for community's cultural, linguistic, and political expressions. The article points towards the persistent dilemma of the Sikh elite as it makes sense of various compulsions, choices, and strategies in the postcolonial Indian polity.

Introduction

The twentieth century offered its share of violence, dislocation and political upheavals for the Sikh community. Two disruptions occurred, with the first in 1947 as the British decided to abandon its Indian empire. Two provinces, Bengal and Punjab, paid a heavy price during the decolonization process – as a new and hastily announced borderline marked the birth of two new states of India and Pakistan. In Punjab, the borderline cuts through the central districts of Punjab, with predominant Sikh population. With partition, the composite population of the Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus began fighting each other – Muslims relocating to western parts of Punjab (which became part of Pakistan) while Hindus and Sikhs took refuge on the Indian side of the border. Nearly 300,000 Punjabi men, women and children perished in the communal frenzy and unprecedented massacres that accompanied the huge transfers of populations.

The Sikhs had hardly adjusted to the new geographic implications of their location within the Indian polity when a new tragedy unhinged them. In June 1984, the Golden Temple, Amritsar – the most sacred centre of the Sikh religion – was the scene of ferocious fighting between Sikh militants and Indian armies – after negotiations on certain demands for autonomy led by the Akali Dal failed to persuade the central government. The resulting destruction of the Akal Takht and extensive damage to the whole complex of sacred buildings was a traumatic experience for most Sikhs and the repercussions of this tragedy have been far reaching. It has forced a revaluation of the Sikh community's

place in India, a restructuring of the community's institutions and organizations, rupture of its traditions and all this under duress, in a framework largely determined by a state bound by a different set of agenda.

As a direct consequence of the tragedy, Sikhs were forced to engage in an intensive debate about the community's future, including the previously unthinkable scenario of an independent Sikh state. A new generation of Sikhs are now trying to make sense of the critical year of 1984, situating their parents' unlettered tale associated with the events of 1984 events as they witnessed or heard them. And this of course in the face of the official propaganda by the Indian state that it was a desperate bid for Khalistan (a conspiracy theory internalized by the Sikh diaspora and aided by foreign powers) or that in the absence of such a drastic action, the Akali Dal campaign would have dismembered India.

Meanwhile as the militancy was brought to an end in the early 1990s, India's Sikh leaders were again attracted by the perks of political openings in the state legislatures and other state establishments. Many rebels, even those charged with 'sedition' assured the state of their loyalty, while others talked of how they were led astray. The main political party of Punjabi Sikhs, the Akali Dal founded a coalition with the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) and formed a joint ministry in Punjab from 1997 to 2002 and then again from 2007 onwards under Parkash Singh Badal as Chief Minister of Punjab.

Political pundits are equally divided and bewildered over this turn of events; whether state terror had chastised the Sikh leaders to eschew any provincial demands or whether the character of this political party has undergone transformation to treat its Sikh constituency with such caution. Certainly the Akali Dal has almost completely abandoned its demands for Punjab autonomy devoting its governmental authority, time and energy to discipline some dissident Akali factions who keep reminding them of 'discrimination' or dismissing cases of injustice or human rights violations which keep appearing in public even after three decades. Moreover, the main Akali leadership has provided vocal support to much of the Hindutva agenda – including vigorous support for Modi in 2014 elections, who is now head of the federal state as Prime Minister of India.

So there are three levels of this tragedy to consider – the way ordinary Sikhs felt and coped with its fall-out, second, how the Sikh elite attempted to understand its meaning and offered ways of mitigating its effects, and finally how the Sikh political leaders both chalked out and walked out of this upheaval and adopted new strategies – learning lessons of the postcolonial political setup. Thus, the main aim of this paper is to reflect back on the way the tragedy has impacted upon Sikhs and how far rules and procedures adopted by the postcolonial Indian polity have provided space for an acknowledgement of the traumatic experiences for its Sikh subjects. Some remarks are also in order regarding the role of the Sikh diaspora as it became intimately involved in the Punjab crisis.

A tragedy in the making

On 3 June 1984, something hardly believable was happening in Punjab. It was the day of Guru Arjan's martyrdom – the fifth guru who had completed the building of Harmandir

and installed the sacred composition known as the Guru Granth at its centre. It was the day when every large Sikh village would organize a religious procession offering cold drinks to passers-by as a celebration of the great guru, a scholar-saint and fifth descendant of Guru Nanak. Insensitive to the Sikh calendar, the government ordered six armed divisions of the Indian army led by a Lt. Gen. and two Major Generals, with armoured carriers, tanks, mountain guns – all against 300 to 500 men armed with nothing more than ‘LMGs, antiquated 303 rifles, some hand grenades and a rusty bazooka’.

The army marched into Punjab villages and towns imposing a week-long curfew and took up positions around the Golden Temple on the evening of 3 June 1984. The battle for the Golden Temple had begun. The army was ordered to use minimal force to ‘free the Golden Temple from “extremists and terrorists”’ while for the Sikhs inside it was a battle for maintaining the temple’s sanctity. Code-named ‘Operation Bluestar’, the army action ended as a major disaster both militarily as well in its supposed aim of curbing violence in Punjab. The Indian army could not clear the sacred temple of the insurgents without damaging the Temple extensively. After suffering heavy losses for 2 days, the army deployed 6 tanks and approximately 80 high-explosive squash-head shells to reduce the fortified positions of Sikh insurgents at the Akal Takht to rubble. Among the wreckage lay a large catalogue of Sikh historical heritage; hand-written copies of Guru Granth, canopies, gold and silver palanquins, including a canopy donated by the Sikh royalty in its famous Tosh-e-Khana among other historic gifts to the Golden Temple.¹ The morning of 7 June saw a fire sweeping through another treasury of Sikh heritage at the Sikh Museum and Library with many rare hand-written manuscripts, *hukannamas*. Several hundred pilgrims (including women and children) died in the cross-firing. The army converted Guru Ramdas Sarai into ‘enemy prison camps’ where more civilians died in the suffocating heat without water. Total casualties inside the Golden Temple remain contested, between the official counts of 300 army officer and men, with 500 civilians, while impartial observers put 700 army officers and men and about 5000 civilians.² The army also took control of 37 other historic gurdwaras around Punjab with some resistance at some places and casualties too.

The morning after

As the soldiers started mopping up, the sacred pool walk-around (*parikarma*), carrying and disposing rotting dead bodies unceremoniously into hired trucks outside the main gate the Indian government had to open another front: a propaganda war aimed to control an outraged Sikh community’s anger and trauma. The tone and content of this propaganda about the army action in the Golden Temple can be aptly rephrased through Auden’s poem (1940) *Lies of the state touch the sky*. Controlling information regarding the damage to the holy buildings was the first worry for the government as Sikhs from villages were being blocked by army units from reaching Amritsar. The government-controlled television channel, Doordarshan, repeated clips of Kirpal Singh, Jathedar of Akal Takht, clearly under duress, reading a prepared statement that most buildings of the sacred precinct are intact. In the next few days, blatant lies included finding drugs and women abused by militants and exaggerated tales of terrorists’ misdeeds inside were part of India’s only TV channel under government control.³ Sikh listeners switched to BBC and other foreign news channels for more accurate reports.

On 31 October, Mrs Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards. Anti-Sikh pogroms followed, orchestrated by Congress Party workers, in which over 3000 Sikhs were killed in New Delhi, while several hundred died in other northern cities.⁴ In order to contain the Sikh resistance, Indian security forces had to undertake several more special operations: Operation Woodrose, Operation Black Thunder, Rakshak, Night Dominance, Rakshak II and Final Assault. The rebellion lasted almost a decade, claiming an estimated toll of 80,000 lives. Abandoning Punjab to the security forces armed with Draconian anti-terrorist powers, bloody confrontations took place across the province. With the adoption of 'bullet for bullet' policy by police and security forces, fake encounters, extrajudicial killings and torture became the norm. A 'dead silence' was enforced after a decade-long undeclared war in the Punjab. In 1992, a spuriously elected Congress Party was installed into power under Beant Singh as Chief Minister. His assassination on 31 July 1995 effectively signalled the end of the Sikh resistance, whose origins lay in the army invasion of the Golden Temple.

Justifying the unthinkable: a state versus a community narrative

How was the state to justify its brutal action? The vocabulary of terrorism was not applied as indiscriminately by governments in the 1980s as it was in the aftermath of the 9/11 New York bombings. But the India state had another equally forceful moral language – which worked particularly well on its all-believing Hindu constituency, namely that the state had acted for a greater cause, namely the unity of India. It presented a resolution through the Parliament which approved the government's 'timely action' with most opposition leaders lauding the armed forces' 'restraint and bravery'. There were few dissenters. Within six weeks of the army action, Indian officials put together a White Paper containing a highly skewed account of the circumstances which forced the state to act.⁵ Chronicling the army's action with bureaucratic brush, it showed photographs of weapons, a catalogue of violent incidents (tacking along many unrelated ones too) prior to the army action alongside the text of the Prime Minister's broadcast. The government narrative of self-justification centred on the need to prevent the balkanization of India. In her broadcast on 2 June, Indira Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, addressed the nation with the following words:⁶

Fellow citizens, these past months, my heart has been heavy with sorrow, each day's tragedies adding to the anguish. Punjab is uppermost in all our minds. Yet an impression has been assiduously created that it is not being dealt with. My colleagues and I have repeatedly explained, in parliament and outside, the government's readiness to accept all reasonable demands put forward by the Akali Dal when they started their agitation, but new demands continue to be pressed. Unfortunately, the leadership of the agitation appears to have been seized by a group of fanatics and terrorists whose instruments for achieving whatever they may have in view of murder, arson and loot. Large scale violence and terrorism grip the state. Let us join together to heal wounds. Don't shed blood, shed hatred.

Clearly Indira Gandhi found no paradox of her timing calling for peace precisely as she had just prepared a bloodbath for Punjabis by ordering a major army operation into the most sensitive centre of a faith. More propaganda was to follow, some of it sent abroad for the agitated diaspora Sikhs. With the army in control of Punjab, censorship in operation, rebuttals of such massive state propaganda and lies was an impossible task. Nevertheless the government's tactics had not gone unchallenged.

Another, even more urgent task facing the government was to salvage the destruction of the Akal Takht as it rightly feared Sikhs' emotional outbursts on seeing the damaged building. Immediately a contractor was hired from Delhi, while a Nihang leader, Santa Singh was propped up to supervise its re-construction according to *maryada*. Buta Singh, the only Sikh member of the federal government, was flying furiously between Delhi, Amritsar and Patna to appease and galvanize the situation. He managed to persuade the Patna Jathedar to ensure some religious proprietary in starting reconstruction as all the Sikh clergy refused to participate in any government undertaking of repairing the sacred precinct. The old building of Akal Takht was so badly damaged with the shelling that a new structure was needed. This was raised within days as the government was under intense pressure to re-open the shrine. In its search to pin the Punjab crisis, the government White Paper invented several monsters among the community. Besides Bhindranwale's portrayal as a demonic figure, several leaders among the Sikh diaspora were blamed to fan Sikh separatism from abroad (Tatla 1999).

Even as the state had full monopoly of Doordarshan, India's only television channel, it could not manipulate all the news emanating from the Golden Temple. Nor it could stop ordinary Sikhs and Hindus spreading news, even as telephones and newspapers were shut down. It was obvious that ordinary Sikhs were badly hurt as pictures of damaged Akal Takht were circulating. Indeed, the army attack, its manner and execution resulting in the demolition of the Akal Takht with extensive damage to the whole of sacred complex sent shock waves into Sikh communities around the world. While it was deeply painful for people to deal with reports about the Golden Temple complex in control of armies, the Akal Takht in ruins, with hundreds of dead bodies scattered around the pool, blood-shot sacred water, was a truly traumatic experience beyond the comprehension of ordinary Sikhs.

Ordinary Sikhs' reaction: trauma, resistance and dissolution

The first groups of pilgrims allowed back in the Golden Temple after the attack exhibited all the symptoms of trauma, looking amazed and bewildered, just trying to forget what they had seen, a few were seen retrieving a broken stone from the debris to take home. Above all unable to speak about or share what they had seen. None among the first pilgrims have left their impressions; perhaps the scene was too painful for verbal expressions. For many Sikhs the government's action was not only an unpardonable sacrilege, it broke an implicit trust between the Sikh community and the Indian state that came into existence as the imperial power ended in 1947.

Contrary to government assertions and declarations that the army action had broken the back of extremism, the whole of Punjab was soon converted into a theatre of war.

The Sikh peasantry reacted with characteristic courage and defiance. Despite a strict curfew, tanks surrounding villages in the countryside and helicopters hovering above, thousands of angry Sikhs rushed from their villages towards Amritsar carrying arms and home-made weapons to defend the sanctity of the Golden Temple.⁷ This happened not only in Amritsar district but as far as Ludhiana, Ferozpur and Bathinda district villages. At several places, the armies had to fire shots to disperse the gathering of highly emotional and angry Sikhs.⁸ Helicopters were flown over many villages to awe Sikh crowds. Nevertheless several hundred managed to make their way to Harike Pattan, where a strict barrier was enforced by a contingent of security forces. Mutinies broke out among Sikh soldiers who were mostly from rural areas. The most serious was at Sikh Regimental Centre, Ramgarh in Bihar involving over 1500 soldiers. Other regiments which mutinied were 18th Sikh in Miran Sahib, Jammu, 9th Sikh at Lalgarh Jattan, Ganagnagar, Rajsthan, 14th Punjab [Nabha Akal] at Pune, Maharashtra, 171 Field Regiment at Alwar, Rajasthan.⁹

Following the murder of Indian Prime Minister Gandhi by her two Sikh bodyguards, anti-Sikh riots spread in the capital city and some northern Indian cities. Fear gripped Sikh families living in other parts of India. Between 1983 and 1986, some 26,000 Sikh refugee families arrived in the Punjab from other parts of India, and over a thousand Hindu families moved out (see Jaijee 1999). And the battle of militants and government security forces from 1984 to 1994 claimed the lives of an estimated number which vary from 25,000 to 80,000, while an even larger number of Sikh families suffered losses and indignities, several thousand men were listed as 'disappeared'. In 2015, after 30 years, a several hundred are still in prisons facing various charges.

How did ordinary Sikhs react to this state terror? During the decade-long struggle of resistance and revenge activities, for a large silent section of the community, the Indian state effectively became an 'enemy', a huge repressive machinery caring little for the security and welfare of its 'Sikh citizens'. Through such anguish, the Sikh rebellion was born, grew fast and kept simmering for a full decade. As an immediate reaction to the desecration of the Golden Temple, several militant groups were formed. The Indian state became embroiled in increasingly repressive measures against these militants who sought revenge for the army invasion of the Golden Temple and at one time gave a call for Khalistan, a sovereign state for the Sikhs. The Punjab became not only a safe haven, but also a territory and a symbolic area that was seen to be Sikhs' own.¹⁰

After the army operation, within a few days, as the government allowed Sikh pilgrims inside the Golden Temple for two hours under the watchful eyes of security forces, there were tears all around. Some sobbed silently, others cried openly and a few uncontrollably while others faced the shattered Akal Takht in disbelief and all the buildings around. As Lloyd (2000) points out, in such a situation;

The perpetrator, no less than the victim, insists on the conditions of silence. This can occur both through the coercive exercise of power, physically and discursively and through the more intricate and 'hegemonic' use of power that occludes from public space the social logics within which the victim could 'make sense'.¹¹

The reaction after the *Ghallughara* was precisely what is usually associated with a trauma. In psychotherapeutic literature, a trauma is defined not so much as the

undergoing of intense, inflicted pain, but as a state of what is strictly terror. In the words of Herman:

At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning.

(1992, 33)

At the critical juncture of June 1984, the main reaction to the crisis was a characteristically peasant rebellion. Several militant groups sprang up to avenge the humiliation heaped on the community by the Indian state, which some of them referred to as 'Hindu fascism'. They could draw on no other tradition than the past 'Sikh heroic tradition'. The militants had a martyr in Bhindranwale who laid his life for the faith, but left no legacy other than an adamant rhetorical resistance recorded on audio tapes. This rhetoric amounted to little more than a set of incoherent assertions unable to convince a literate world. Notwithstanding the government's effort to portray him as an ideologue of Khalistan, the Sant had exhibited marked ambivalence towards such a demand. Although the critical event so shocked the Sikh sentiments as to legitimize the cry for an independent state, the demand itself had no legacy other than wild dreams of a fringe led by the muddled writings of Kapur Singh – a civil servant, who was for a while member of Parliament and one among drafters of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution.

For the Sikh community's suffering in such an unexpected way from the Indian state, ordinary Sikhs had a precise term for it – the *Ghallughara*. It is not a lightly used term in common parlance. Derived from Sikh historical literature, its use is restricted to just two episodes, and even when it is applied to them, a distinction is made between the two. The first which occurred in 1746 is called *Chhota Ghallughara* [Small Holocaust] and the second in 1762 known as *Vadda Ghallughara*, [Great Holocaust]. The third *Ghallughara* as it came to be commonly known among the community occurred some 222 years later in 1984 when the Indian army invaded the Golden Temple.¹² Adoption of this terminology to the new tragedy suggests a community's search for its attending redemptive value of quick recovery from such massacres as also to use it as a resource to challenge the hegemonic discourse by the Indian state – which employed various terms starting with the army action as 'Operation Blue Star', its stated aim to 'flush extremists from the Golden Temple' or most ostensibly to 'save India from disintegration'. Hymn-singers from the Harimandir, where no speeches are made as per its historical tradition, could cite enough rebellious passages from *gurbani* to embarrass the authorities. In June every year they would recite, *paap ki jhanjh lasi kabulon dhaya, jorin mange dan ve lalo* (Oh, Lalo, see the tyrant at the head of sinners from Kabul has arrived extracting forcibly his bounty) '*raje shinh mukadam kute* (Kings the powerful are like litigious dogs) or Bhai Gurdas' edict *kuta raj bahaliye fir chaki chate* (If you place a dog on the throne, don't expect it to rise above its habit of licking the flour). Ordinary Sikhs called it a 'Ghallughara'. And the term found justification in the reactions of ordinary Sikhs' to various subsequent events starting with a visit to the devastated buildings of Harimandir.

Many Punjabis were caught between the militants' ire and security forces' terror and suffered indignities. Cases of rapes and brutal killings in 'staged' encounters

became routine. Thousands were desperate for escape from terror. Families or individuals who became victims of the state's repression or militants' commands saw no end to their troubles. The fate of known militant family members was intolerably bad. As a militant member was killed, the police or paramilitary authorities usually picked another relative until the whole family lost support within the village and felt 'dishonoured' beyond grief. What could such a family do to mitigate their 'honour'? In many cases, it would put its resources together to smuggle a family member abroad, or pull any overseas connection to facilitate such emigration.¹³ And this migration which was by and large confined to marginal peasants before then became almost an obsession among the middle class, the very rich even 'aristocratic' families; ex-maharajahs, landlords, prominent politicians, university teachers, lawyers, judges and civil servants. This was ordinary Sikhs' reaction to the aftermath of 1984 events, to indignities suffered which laid down the psychological and mental outlook for 'mass migration' with its overwhelming resolution – 'leave the ill-governed Punjab'.

Reaction of the Sikh elite

The traumatic conditions of the community in the aftermath of 1984 posed serious challenges to the Sikh elite, its academics in particular. V.S. Naipaul noted the lack of any discernible Sikh intellectual tradition. He chided Sikh elites stating that this was a community guided by saints of 'medieval outlook' (Tatla 2003). The 1984 crisis drove this statement home, embarrassingly so. Accused by the state in many specific ways, its elite could fall back upon no articulated heritage to ride the crisis. No concerted efforts by concerned scholars were forthcoming either through critical analysis of the crisis or even the rebuttal of some outlandish charges. Despite the expansion of Sikh elite through several universities by the 1980s, there had emerged no systematic 'Sikh school of thought' in any discipline of arts or social sciences. So the masses were left on their own to react to the crisis.

The lack of intellectual culture amongst Sikhs was due to the peculiar structure of the Sikh elite as they found themselves in the 1980s. The composition of the Sikh elite is unique and in many ways a creation of colonial rule – which has only in recent years started to unravel. The Sikh elite are predominantly entrenched in the security apparatus of the Indian state despite a gradual reduction undertaken by the postcolonial state – the priority being to reduce its dependence on former 'martial races'. It was and still remains a predominantly rural community – with disproportionate share of its young men recruited to armed forces – or a business community that generally shuns politics. Being part of the colonial Indian army provided an outlook of loyalty, an almost special relationship with their British officers as partners in the Empire.

How the different constituencies amongst Sikh elites face the crisis? First, a few individuals of independent means such as the atheist journalist Khushwant Singh, or Amritinder Singh, the ex-Maharaja of Patiala, indignantly sent back their honours as a matter of protest at the state's ghastly action in the Golden Temple. Khushwant Singh was ideally suited to emerge as the spokesman for the troubled community. Reporting back from an early visit to the Harmandir to see for himself the damage to sacred precinct, he recorded how despite the hasty repairs carried out, he could still see the bullet holes through the Harmandir itself. It was obvious that the state had lied about the

damage to the inner sanctum too. Echoing collective sentiments of the community, Singh wrote:

My heart is very full but I will be as unemotional and objective as I can. All I will say about the army action is that it was a tragic error of judgement, a grievous mistake and miscalculation which will cover many black pages in the history of India, Punjab and the Sikhs. This action has humiliated the pride of a very proud people. A proud people do not forget or forgive very easily.

(1992, 59–61)

He also predicted quite correctly ordinary Sikhs' outrage as:

It will take a long time for blood-stains to be washed away from the marble *parikarma* and the building around the Harmandir. It will take even longer for the sullen resentment smouldering in the hearts of Sikhs community to subside. Time can be the best healer, provided nothing is done to further exacerbate Sikh sentiment.

(1992, 75)

Prior to the army action, Khushwant Singh, as a Member of Parliament, had pointedly asked the Indian government on 8 August 1983 about the charge laid by the Prime Minister:

The PM has gone on record to say that at different times the Akalis have been adding to their demands. To the best of my knowledge they made a concise list of forty-five demands and to this day they have not added a single one to these forty-five.

(1992, 20)

He also questioned the government's charge of misusing the Golden Temple:

Much has been said about the misuse of gurdwaras for harbouring criminals. Mr. Home Minister if you have any concrete evidence of criminals being harboured inside the Golden Temple, you should place it on the Table of the House. At one time a list of 40 men was given to the Akali Dal; it was found that at least four of them were not even living in the country. They were abroad Is the kind of evidence that you are going to give us and then say that the Golden Temple is being misused?¹⁴

Khushwant Singh while condemning the government's justification for sending armies into the Golden Temple also squarely blamed 'narrow-minded Akali leaders along with the deliberately mischievous politics of the central government'. However, writing in more leisurely times, he had argued for a Sikh homeland where the Khalsa traditions could be preserved.¹⁵ Although hurt by the 1984 tragedy, writing in 2006, he felt that the Sikh community's future lay in India, 'with a Sikh Prime Minister and a Sikh army chief staff, the shadow of 1984 can now truly be forgotten'.

The state could find enough Sikhs, especially among its security forces, to defend its actions in writing, though virtually all of them refrained to justify the army action in the

Golden Temple describing this as rather ‘unfortunate’ or a ‘mistake’. The most well-known personality, hailed by the Indian media, was K.P.S. Gill, who served as the Punjab police chief credited for dismantling the Sikh militancy while overseeing a regime of impunity for killing, torture and disappearances. Gill offered his diagnosis of the ‘greatest moral crisis’ facing the Sikh faith. Gill questioned the Sikhs’ portrayal as a discriminated minority.¹⁶ Instead of adopting a ‘narrow cultural identity’ Gill advised Sikhs to adopt the true teachings of the gurus.

This ‘going back to basics’ advice also came from two notable Sikh intellectuals: Hans (1986) and Singh (1993), who argued that the Sikh Gurus’ political message is for ‘good governance’.

Other old Sikh army veterans could not endorse the state’s bungled army operation pointing out how the same objective could have been achieved through a less dramatic and bloody intervention. General Arora, a veteran of Banlgadesh war, argued thus and was endorsed by Lt. Gen. Harbakhsh Singh and many high-ranking Sikh officers. That such an option was not taken by the Prime Minister’s advisors led to the logical conclusion that her motive was to win the forthcoming parliamentary elections by projecting herself as a saviour of India who had saved the country from disintegration.¹⁷

A different set of reactions emerged from Punjabi creative literature. Several novels, short stories and memoirs portray in different ways how the tragedy affected Punjabi lives. All major Punjabi writers Sant Singh Sekhon, Dalip Kaur Tiwana and the new generation writers have provided fictional accounts for literary critics to work out their views regarding the crisis. Fiction writing on the turmoil now include some in English language, with some notable contributions by diaspora writers.¹⁸

Much of Punjabi poetry is also concerned with the crisis. These generally view the political developments in Punjab in terms of vested interests between two opposing parties – the Akali Dal and the central government – condemning them both in equal measure and preaching a tepid universal message. To this literary genre, one should add recorded songs performed by Dhadis and other popular artists which had gained much popularity in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy.¹⁹ Unlike the poetic genre, the Dhadis genre managed to gauge the pain and dilemma of ordinary Sikhs. In the aftermath of the 1984 crisis, the predicament and social psychology of the community was admirably captured by two poets. In the pre-1984 period, the mood was relaxed as ‘the nation was half asleep at guru’s feet’²⁰ wrote Mahboob (1990, 829), and with the crisis the community was confounded into hopelessness seeking guru’s guidance (1990, 417):

Enough blood has flown through the Satluj
 Does not it speak to you?
 Lost we are in a powerful swirl
 A fate of untold miseries and forsaken
 We face men who speak of their countries
 The homeless we remain
 Bereft of any land to call our own
 Where are you, Oh!, our guardian?
 Come and guide us, Kalghidhar!.

Another poet, Harbhajan Singh lamented the trust the Sikhs had placed in the Indian state. Events in 1984 seared the trust [with Hindus] that had been built over centuries:

Slowly, and surely, the wounds will heal
 Broken hearts reconciled
 New agreements reached, and differences minimized
 But the unsaid trust that existed before
 That is gone, and gone forever.²¹

Among memoirs are some notable accounts from ordinary Sikhs such as Sandip Kaur, and Balbir Singh Kaura who were caught up in the turmoil. A highly influential academic, Sardara Singh Johl, who was Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University, in his memoir provides an inside view of its Sikh and Hindu academics in the immediate aftermath of the army action in Amritsar. One should also add some high-ranking Sikh officers' accounts of some personal experiences during the crisis. Gurdev Grewal, a senior Sikh IAS officer left a candid memoir of various personalities playing 'dirty games' from Intelligence Bureau officers supervising a planned accumulation of arms in the Golden Temple to politicians such as Giani Zail Singh, or religious leaders such as Man Singh – *jathedars* of Patna. A former Director General of Intelligence Services, Dhar commented upon on the role of government agencies responding to militants' violence in Punjab as:

The state forces responded with equal ferocity in questionable acts of plunder, extortion, inhuman torture and murder of innocent people. ... These were not violent responses to violent acts by the terrorists. These were organised acts of state repression that alienated the people and eroded their faith in the rule of law, as enshrined in the constitution.

(2005, 383–384)

From Amritsar, three academics (Puri, Judge, and Sekhon 1999) based at Guru Nanak Dev University analysed 'grass roots reality' under the problematic title of 'Punjab Terrorism'. Their investigations found nothing more than militants riven by caste and political factions that soon degenerated into mindless killings. A related study (Judge 2005) showed how the militants tried to construct a particular version of the Sikh community using coercion through the Punjabi media.²² Gupta (1997) in another major study placed the 1984 Sikh reaction within a meta-narrative of the Indian political framework. How the Indian press, especially northern Indian newspapers, portrayed the events through a highly distorted eye was hardly exposed.²³ Significantly, a notable Sikh historian J.S. Grewal argued that the Khalistan issue emerged seriously only after the 'Operation Bluestar, anti-Sikh riots and Operation Woodrose' pointing out the Akali Dal, never took up the demand for Khalistan. Hence the Indian state's charge was incorrect though he stopped short of it calling a mischievous propaganda.²⁴

If Punjab based academics have not produced much original work on 1984, there has been a steady induction of diaspora Sikh elites to compensate them. A range of contributions were made and are steadily increasing. Studies range from political mobilization among the Sikh diaspora as a reaction to the crisis to many other

issues of Sikhs as a minority in India and overseas locations.²⁵ Moreover in the last decade, websites have become common platforms for diaspora communities to exchange views.

Foreign scholars of course looked at the ethnic composition of the Sikhs and the ways the Sikhs have portrayed themselves in the postcolonial India. Paul Brass (1974, 1990, 1991) is an American political scientist who has devoted much of his career for the study of Punjab politics. Although there is much diversity within the community, its shared religion, language, history, sacred shrines and something about the land of five river could not satisfy the criterion of 'nation-in-the making'. Brass has also noted how the postcolonial Indian leaders, especially Nehru, had drawn the line for ethnic demands – in dismissing Akali Dal demands for Punjabi-speaking state as a step towards separatism. So, as a Punjabi-speaking state was formed after Nehru's demise, what was the latest phase of demands which ended in this imbroglio? Brass advised against falling into the trap of state's terminology of labelling it as 'terrorism' or following some militants' call, 'a campaign for Khalistan'. Both are misleading terms, and he suggested the term 'insurrection' arising from an exaggerated sense of community pride.²⁶

Mandair (2009) obviously deeply affected by the Punjab crisis has sought to reinterpret Indian religious traditions broadly against the secular/religious axis of the western philosophy. He has redrawn the ambit of Sikh theological debate, thereby opening up new avenues for thinking about Sikh subjectivity beyond the worn out paths of the Marxist left and the religious nationalism of the right. This reformulation, he advances, will guard minorities such as the Sikhs from the cycles of repression by an Indian state that is itself trying to mould its diverse linguistic, ethnic and tribal populations according to the shape of Hindutva ideology. Shani (2008) endorses this discourse to shun the trap of ethno-nationalism through an alternative model for the Sikh global community around a non-state Panthic entity. However, this path towards a sort of Sikh cosmopolitanism is unlikely to be a smooth one particularly for a community largely drawn from the peasantry and attached to its lands in Punjab, with Punjabi as language of its scriptures and folk culture.

From a more materialistic perspective, Singh (2005, 2008, 2010) has offered an analysis of the federal structure of Indian polity showing how economic terms are loaded against Punjab where even constitutional arrangements have a clear Hindu bias.²⁷ How does the Sikh diaspora make sense of 1984? While we know something about early mobilization when several diasporic Sikh organizations supported various militant groups, what seems less clear is how, with the passage of time, this tragedy impacted upon new generations? This is unexplored territory as yet except for a study by Nijhawan (2008) who has examined Toronto Sikh youth's search for making sense of it in their lives. There is some indication that Sikh diasporic elites can assume a more significant role detached from the compulsions of Punjabi academics, as there are some indications already evident of such intervention.²⁸

This brings us to the role of another variety of elite, namely advocates, human rights activists and others working in judicial and legal services. No retired judge, Sikh or Hindu, has pinned down any memoirs of judiciary, how it worked under the repressive legislation swiftly passed through Indian Parliament, the notorious Terrorist and Disruptive Activities and several other legislative measures. Some legal advocates who raised

their heads above the pulpit found the penalty too high as a Ropar advocate found out. As soon as he presented a case of violation of human rights for a victim, he was shot dead on orders of a senior police officer. Three human rights agencies worked in Punjab at a time in the 1980s and 1990s when activists were frequently intimidated, threatened or thrown into jails with immunity.²⁹ It was only on behalf of some foreign-based human rights agencies that a few cases were highlighted and some cumulative evidence gathered. It was left to a South Indian activist Ram Narayan Kumar, who gathered much of such abuses, part of which was submitted to the Supreme Court and later National Human Rights Commission to seek compensation for those who 'disappeared' in Amritsar district, including its chief investigator Jawant Singh Khalra. Kumar (2008) with several years' experience in representing various petitions of human rights to the Supreme Court of India and the National Human Rights Commission recorded how the doors to justice, truth and reparation in Punjab were shut. He observed,

It became obvious that what the State agencies have done to the Sikhs of Punjab is not short of genocide, if not in terms of Article 2 of the Convention then certainly in terms of the basic conception of what it constitutes.³⁰

Relatively few studies were devoted to 'grass-root reality' as such; thus we find no detailed account of the impact of insurgency upon one particular family or families or a particular village. In the law faculties of Punjab, there were no follow-up cases of any family caught up frantic legal appeals by parents to retrieve their sons picked up by the police and made to 'disappear'.³¹ Indeed as militants gained an upper hand in certain parts of Punjab in the mid-1980s, it was a failing state which became 'criminalized' and took draconian measures such as 'bribing disheartened security and police forces to fight' on its behalf.³² As political scientists have contended, this resistance to state was proof enough of Punjabi dissatisfaction with the Indian statecraft which treated even genuine calls for reconciliation as no more than a law-and-order problem to be dealt sternly. B.P. Singh sums up the Indian state's strategy as:

The state framed an instrumentalist and a mechanical vision of the Punjab problem, a problem of law and order and took measures to settle that primarily by strengthening and modernising the repressive state apparatus.

(2002, 119)

It is obvious that Sikh academics have yet to address the crucial issues arising from the 1984 crisis. That the Sikhs' predicament at least partly arises from the postcolonial state's agenda of a highly integrated and centralized structure is not posed at all, nor how a visible minority was held to ransom by a manipulative federal leader to gain electoral popularity. Is there any scope for symbolic and material expressions for 'provincial nationalism' in a country which is struggling to mould memories and cultures of its diverse peoples into the uniform code of a reproducible narrative? Thus, a systematic analysis of the Sikhs' predicament is yet to begin, indeed may never begin, given the state of Sikh Studies at Punjab's universities and the current calibre of its elite. Confounded by state patronage, with no independent centres of thinking, and easily led either into leftist idealism or back to a colonially inspired 'Sikh theology', the Sikh elite face the peculiar

crisis of 'serving two masters' in contemporary India. The allocation of federal funds for regional studies are discouraged and funding sources for Punjab Studies are few, especially those for its distinct history, social formations and cultural studies.

There are several fields of studies which require the attention of Sikh intellectuals. Of immediate relevance is a comparative framework for the study of the colonial versus postcolonial regime. Although, much has been written on the European empires built through deceit, violence, land-grabbing, regular cruelties and occasional genocides they indulged in; however, a distinguishing feature of British imperial power, as far as minorities were concerned, was to recognize India's diversity by incorporating many layers of state structures; from princely states to tribal regions, recognition of indigenous social customs through the state's legal and administrative directives. British India was a loose federal state with imperial authority ensuring representation of various religious and tribal communities. Its administrators harboured somewhat natural sympathy for minorities and indigenous peoples and tribes. Moreover, for British rulers, a balance between different communities' claims was an important ethical issue. Of course such a policy was seen and condemned by Indian nationalists (mostly Hindus) as a divide-and-rule tactic.

In contrast the new postcolonial Indian regime adopted a unitary constitutional structure with universal franchise, scrapping the colonial system of guaranteed representation for minorities. The only exception made was for 'scheduled tribes' and certain 'castes'.³³ The state building and governance was to be built on three principles: (a) secularism, with freedom of worship and state non-interference; (b) economic welfare for substantive citizenship rights; and (c) democratic centralism, providing a structure of power-sharing between sub-national regions and the Union state.³⁴ Haunted by the spectre of dissolution, the principle of self-determination for regions and nationalities was fully ruled out. Instead, it provided for the reorganization of linguistic regions while 14 languages were recognized as state languages. Hindi was to be the official language of India along with English. In 1953, when Telugu-speakers forced a demand to reorganize its state, a States Reorganisation Commission was established. By the 1980s, the Indian union consisted of 22 states with 15 official languages.

This state-building process had a differential impact on non-Hindu communities. The adoption of Hindi put regional languages on the defensive. An aggressive drive towards integration and unification of personal laws smacked of Hindu hegemony. Indeed, such 'integrative' policies have put Hindus, especially from Hindi-speaking regions, at an advantage over members of other community groups.³⁵ It can be argued that the adoption of universal franchise has put minorities at a disadvantage, especially in ethnically divided provinces such as Punjab and the northeastern provinces. Moreover India's constitutional centralism has led to a widespread process of manipulation and repression of regional nationalisms. Even the second chamber of Parliament has no provision for articulating and safeguarding provincial interests, a common practice in many federal regimes. Thus, some political scientists have argued that the democratic franchise is effective for majorities, while minorities are subject to hegemonic control, including spells of violent control. In such a context, the main ethnic group can effectively 'dominate another through its political, economic, and ideological resources and can extract what it requires from the subordinated'.³⁶

Having dismantled the colonial rules for representation of minorities, India's postcolonial state privileged the dominant Hindu communities by: (a) recruiting the civil and military government disproportionately from the majority ethnic group;³⁷ and (b) employing cultural attributes and values of the dominant ethnic community for defining its national ideology – its history, language, religion and moral values. Thus, it can be argued that the new Indian national identity is not ethnically neutral but derived from the Hindu world, even when it employs the language of universalism. The net result of the state's institutions, its constitution, its laws, and its monopolization of power has meant a differential impact upon various communities, while empowering the dominant ethnic community, the Hindus. Such characteristic runs through most postcolonial states such as Africa and Asia as Weiner has aptly summed up:

In country after country a single ethnic group has taken control over the state and used its powers to exercise control over others. ... in retrospect there has been far less 'nation-building' than many analysts had expected or hoped, for the process of state building has rendered many ethnic groups devoid of power or influence.

(1987, 36–37)

Kedourie (1970) has castigated postcolonial regimes in terms of their treatment of ethnic minorities:

To an imperial government the groups in a mixed area are all equally entitled to some consideration, to a national government they are a foreign body to be either assimilated or rejected. The national state claims to treat all citizens as equal members of the nation, but this fair-sounding principle only serves to disguise the tyranny of one group over another. The nation must be, all its citizens must be, animated by the same spirit. Differences are divisive and therefore treasonable ... to the colonial state they posed no threat, while the post-colonial state has been far less tolerant of its various diverse nationalities. To the post-national state they are all insurgents.

The Indian government's response to various Sikh demands since 1947, first for a linguistic region, and then for a re-negotiation of centre-state relations, and the nature of India's regime, lends credit to Kedourie's proposition. While Hindu nationalism sits comfortably with Indian nationalism, war-like aggressive postures towards its neighbours (especially Pakistan), and projection of Christians, Muslims, and in the post-1984 period, the Sikhs as 'Others' has become part of a new version of Indian nationalism.³⁸

Such a description of the postcolonial regime certainly applies to the Indian state's policies towards the Sikhs and other minorities. In an ethnically divided polity of India, the state has routinely used power to discipline its non-Hindu minorities, the Kashmiris, the Sikhs and peoples of the northeastern states are subject to hegemonic or violent control. In turn these minorities have often perceived the Indian state as 'illegitimate', 'criminal' or indeed as a 'rogue state'³⁹ whose power is manifestly held by unrepresentative bureaucrats and politicians protected by gun-trotting militia men.⁴⁰ For more than

a decade, for the majority of Sikhs, the Indian state and its authority in Punjab was unrepresentative of their will.

Framework of Indian polity and dilemmas of Sikh leaders

This brings us to the political process of postcolonial India and the politics and leadership of Sikhs as a minority community. The Akali Dal is a political party which has consistently claimed to represent the interest of the Sikhs. How to place the role of Akali Dal in this debacle and what lessons has it drawn from the tragedy?

In 1973 the Akali Dal adopted a charter called Anandpur Sahib Resolution, which called attention to the imbalance between provincial and central government powers and asked for a measure of autonomy for provinces and recognition of Sikhs as national community of India. From 1981 a campaign was started by the Akali Dal when 45 demands were presented to the central government and negotiations carried on and off until May 1984. After several rounds of talks, the campaign became progressively more violent. Eventually the central government declared the talks a failure and the central government led by Indira Gandhi decided to crush the Akali Dal's campaign through its armed forces.

The characteristic form of Sikh nation-building based on religious identity was undertaken by the Akali Dal since 1920s. Projecting itself as sole spokesmen for the community, the Akali Dal has asserted that the membership of the Panth 'transcends distance, territory, caste, social barriers and even race'. Maintaining that the religious and political interests of the community are inseparable, it blamed Sikhs joining Congress and other parties of compromising the community interests.⁴¹ Arguing that 'the state must deal with [the Sikhs] as a one people, and not by atomising them into individual citizens' and that the Sikhs' loyalty to the secular state was contingent upon the state's recognition of the Sikhs as a collective group with a historic 'theo-political status'.⁴²

Two major struggles were waged by Akali leaders. The first of these started in 1952 when the Akali Dal called for a culturally congruent Punjabi-speaking region during the first general elections in 1952:

The test of democracy, in the opinion of the Shiromani Akali Dal, is that the minorities should feel that they are really free and equal partners in the destiny of their country ... to bring home this sense of freedom to the Sikhs it is vital that there should a [province of] Punjabi-speaking language and culture.⁴³

A heavily truncated Punjab, along with frustration over sharing political power and new issues arising primarily due to rapid modernization of the Punjabi peasantry, set the scene for a second and more tragic confrontation between the Akalis and the central government in the 1980s. The Akalis mobilized the Sikh peasantry for a major campaign seeking a set of economic, cultural, constitutional and religious demands based on the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, a document heavily couched in Sikh theological idiom. Launching their campaign under the popular name, *Dharam Yudh Morcha* (righteous struggle) in 1981, they also sought to preserve the 'distinct identity of the Sikhs', stating:⁴⁴

The Shiromani Akali Dal shall strive to achieve the main objective to preserve and keep alive the concept of distinct and independent identity of the Panth and to create an environment in which national sentiments and aspirations of the Sikh Panth will find full expression, satisfaction and growth.⁴⁵

Calling for a shift of federal-provincial powers and an explicit recognition of India as a multi-national state, the Akali Dal sought to: (a) devolve powers to provinces and create a new federal structure; (b) redraw Punjab's linguistic boundary by transferring Chandigarh and Punjabi-speaking areas into the province; (c) establish Punjab's control over river waters, farm-product prices, and an increased quota of Sikh recruitment into the armies,⁴⁶ and (d) establish an India-wide elected body of Sikhs to manage all historic shrines, along with some other religious demands, including broadcast of scriptures from the Golden Temple. During the campaign from 1981 to 1984, a new leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, emerged to tax Akalis' pragmatism.⁴⁷ The Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi eyed the Sikh unrest for her own electoral gains especially among the Hindu belt of north India by projecting the Akalis as a threat to the country's unity. Having used a small minority for political advantage to gain electoral power in New Delhi, the central government brought back 'democracy' by holding elections in February 1992 – with the farcical result of a Congress Party victory headed by Beant Singh, who was later assassinated. During the Congress regime, the security forces stepped up their hunt for militants.⁴⁸

By the summer of 1995, the Punjab resumed something close to normality and the central government allowed Akalis back into the political field. In the February 1997 provincial elections, a coalition of Akali Dal and BJP was voted to power, this coalition was defeated in 2002 by the Congress Party headed by Amrinder Singh only to regain power again in 2007 and 2012. The real politics of resources bargaining and distribution returned to Punjab, and the Indian state 'managed' another ethnic conflict by offering the aggrieved group some sharing of political power.

The Akali Dal as a party has abandoned not only all the demands that formed its stable plank for the last two decades, some of its senior leaders even confessed their 'mistake' and how the community had, for a decade, 'gone astray'. Summing up what he found in Punjab, Kumar in his final study observed:

A chapter in the postcolonial history of India has ended with the successful decimation of the Sikh dissent. The Akalis, back in the business of politics with all the regular fluctuations of fortune within a majoritarian framework of democracy in India, have become sensibly silent on the issues of Sikh discontent that precipitated one of the most brutal and sustained repressions of a numerically insignificant minority by any government anywhere in the world. The repression has not only cost too many lives but has also successfully eclipsed the truth of what really happened under the hegemonic narratives of the Punjab turmoil. Not a single demand which the Akali Dal included in its charters submitted to the government of India from the beginning of the agitation in 1981 has been met.

(2008, 364–365)

Given the unprecedented army action and the destruction caused to the Akal Takht and complex buildings, this traumatic event dramatically affected the community's

duality – attachment towards the Indian state on the one hand, and membership of a Sikh ethno-political community on the other.⁴⁹ Amidst much controversy and severely restricted by the Akali Dal, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) after nearly 30 years reluctantly has raised a memorial to Bhindranwale and other Sikhs who perished in the Golden Temple (Chopra 2013). As far the Delhi massacre of Sikhs – there is no end to the controversy despite several commissions' findings. Because massacres took place right in the seat of capital city of India, a city hemmed in by security forces, the issue of connivance of politicians will not die. The Delhi Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, amidst many threats by the government officials, has also built a small memorial to Sikhs killed in November 1984.

Conclusion

The Akal Takht in Amritsar, destroyed in the Indian armies operation, and since rebuilt stands as a testimony to the Indian state's callous disregard for Sikh sentiments. Subdued, delegitimized and questioned in the aftermath of repercussions that engulfed the Sikh community, it continues to provide a rival and rallying centre for the community's shared historical, religious and cultural aspirations. The community's loyalty towards its centre of cultural power continues to clash with its notion of citizenship in Indian polity. As a critical event, June 1984 shifted and sharpened many Sikhs' sense of collective fate and group boundary for a while but it also started disintegrating the ethnic solidarity based upon shared language, religion and Punjab as its homeland. For many Sikhs, the politics of belonging and the nurturing of nationalist sentiment that this required, simply proved too costly. It would have required a systematic collection of voices of those who suffered repression by militant and governmental agencies and articulating it through various channels, and ensuring justice.⁵⁰ Its civic organizations, academics, the elite in general have proved inadequate to the task of finding 'spaces of safety'. Indeed, some who lined up to seek justice from governmental agencies, petitioned various human rights commissions or appealed to diasporic Sikh organizations, have either regretted this action or somehow dare not publish their accounts.

At one stage the Akali Dal along with the SGPC had indicated just such a course to commemorate as well as investigate through a public commission various aspects of the tragedy only to jeopardize or abandon them under central government pressure or as part of political alliance with the BJP. Thus as time passed 'the arrival of a dynamic or insurgent moment of nationalism' became beyond its capacity:

... when this series of spaces is ideally constitutive of subjects rather than merely restorative of subjectivity that have been destroyed by the state terror is no longer practically retrievable, however powerfully they might be summoned.

(Lloyd 2000, 215)

Herman has argued for the necessity of social movements that challenge the common sense of the state in order to create the conditions for a recovery from trauma:

....to hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context which affirms and protects the victim that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the larger society, the social context is created by political movements that give voice to the dis-empowered.

(1992, 9)

Given either a collaborative mind-set or fear of losing livelihood, the Sikh elite have proved incapable of constituting 'another public culture, a set of institutions incomensurable in many ways with those of the state' (Lloyd 2000, 215). In terms of Steiner's (1967) phrase 'we who came after' it is obvious that the Sikh elite was ill-prepared for the challenge posed by the tragedy. They have failed to describe it adequately, much less comprehend and establish alternative visions for the community's future.

Enforced by the federal state, and later abetted by the Akali Dal who spearheaded the community into the tragedy, it seems unlikely that an 'emergence of a national community which can provide for its subjects the paradoxical safety of public acknowledgement' (Lloyd 2000, 215) has become impossible for the Sikhs. Thus, parallel to what therapists call 'spaces of safety' in order to recall and re-articulate victims' memory of state terror and violence, the Sikhs have been unable to create any such spaces.

However, an unequal contest of the community's assertion against the overwhelming official Indian narrative of the tragedy suggested a meagre possibility of recovering and challenging the power of the state to coerce and de-legitimate a community's institutional and ideological framework. Although until the late 1990s, there had existed such a ray of hope for laying the base for an alternative and counter-hegemonic discourse by the Sikh elite. Rather than devote energies to recovering and challenging the power of the state to coerce and de-legitimate a community's institutional and ideological framework and play a positive role in laying the bases for an alternative and counter-hegemonic discourse, all the evidence indicates that the Sikh elite have preferred the safety of silence.

The third *Ghallughara* has swept away a community's ambiguous and almost innocent options of the pre-1984 period. Forging a coherent narrative of the tragedy seems almost impossible. The dilemma for the Sikh community is becoming ever more apparent and almost grave with each passing year. Several individuals' muted voices and dangerous trajectories only remind others either to keep silent or find alternatives which will empower the community without a state. The more realistic Sikhs leave the Punjab for foreign lands – dodging the dilemma altogether substituting nostalgia and idealism in equal measure. Despite some pioneering and painstaking efforts from the diaspora Sikh academics which may well constitute an alternative intellectual or even material means of counter-hegemonic discourse, this possibility as yet is nowhere in sight. And in Wittgenstein's (1961) sense, it is now virtually impossible to think and talk of the event much less look in the face of its consequential resolutions.

The only recourse, in the short term, is perhaps a cry in the wilderness over the lost ideals of a faith. There is little that we know of the psychological damage to the Sikh as a moral person, or to the integrity of a community of Punjabi language as spiritual carriers of sacred scriptures of the Guru Granth. With no public space to mitigate the impact of

the state's brutalities, or private sorrows, pain of damaged or demolished institutions, or vanishing dialects of Punjabi language into India's official language, Sikh subjects could perhaps share the pretence of normality by white-washing as much of its history-carrying monuments as was attempted across the Golden Temple complex by the Indian state in June 1984 in one sweep. That task now has fallen to the Akali Dal to carry on as the burden of a small minority in India's postcolonial polity – to re-write itself as a footnote to India's history or else face forcible strangulation into oblivion as a collective entity. And the mass of Sikh followers of Guru Nanak could re-contextualize his *bani* for the predicament they face:

As I cry, cry with me the whole world
 Birds of jungle cry with me
 Still, my anguished beloved remains aloof
 Nor does he relent

(Guru Granth Sahib, 558)

Notes

- 1 This loss is listed and elaborated by Kaur (1983, 1991). Also see Singh (2003).
- 2 The White Paper (1984, 169–170) lists casualties, dividing them into civilians and army personnel.

	Golden Temple	Other religious places	Other areas	Total
1. Civilian/Terrorist				
Casualties				
[a] Killed	493	23	38	554
[b] Injured	86	14	21	121
2. Army casualties				
[a] Killed				
[i] Officers	4	Y	...	4
[ii] JCOs	4	Y	Y	4
[iii] ORs	75	1	8	84
[b] Injured				
[i] Officers	12	3	Y	15
[ii] JCOs	17	2	Y	19
[iii] ORs	220	19	14	253
3. Civilian/Terrorist				
Apprehensions				
	1592	796	2324	4712

- 3 See Pritam Singh's article in Singh (1985).
- 4 On anti-Sikh genocide in Delhi and other places see *Who are the guilty*;, Mitta and Phoolka (2007), Singh (2009). On Operation Black Thunder see S.J. Singh (2002).
- 5 Government of India, The White Paper (1984).
- 6 Text of broadcast of 2 June 1984 by Mrs Indira Gandhi appears in the White Paper on pages 105–109.

7 The army operation became subject of numerous books. See Tully (1985), Brar (1993), Kaur (1990). Early studies are reviewed in Tatla and Talbot (1995) and others that have appeared since include Singh (2001), Grewal (2006), S.J. Singh (2002), Singh (2011), Goraya (2013). For documents leading to the Akali Dal demands and conflict with the federal government, see, Singh (1989–91, 3 vols).

8 None has gathered evidence of these risings, but several old men verified such defiant gatherings in many villages of Ludhiana district to this author.

9 Commenting upon Sikh soldiers' desertion, General Sunderji said, 'it was basically command failure coupled with this was the enormous emotional psychological pressure which our Sikh troops [mostly raw recruits] were under at that point of time, something which no other class of troops had been through' ... in Bhullar (1987, 81). On the other hand, A.S. Vaidya, chief of the army staff in his broadcast to the nation on 1 July 1984 warned of severe punishment for all deserters.

10 *India Today*, April 15, 1988.

11 Lloyd (2000, 212–228). As 'Gramsci points out a major aspect of hegemony is control over 'common sense', that is, the body of doxa that regulates what passes for sense in any public sphere. See Gramsci (1971, 323–343).

12 The Sikh community's turbulent history of 500 years had generated abundant vocabulary of sufferings from the Mughal and then of Afghan invaders. Taking a cue from its heritage, common Sikhs immediately termed the 1984 tragedy as a *Ghallughara* – this is nearest term for the English word trauma indicating a traumatic experience by a whole community.

13 See Tatla (2010) and also Chopra (2011).

14 Singh (1992, 60–61). 'I mention this specifically and other incidents that have taken place giving rise to the complaint that the Golden Temple has become a sanctuary for criminals. It is, Mr Home Minister, your word and your government's word against the word of the Akali leaders. They deny that criminals are getting sanctuary in these temples. I emphasise this point because I suspect you are trying to create a situation to provide justification for the police to enter the Golden Temple. And Singh warned, 'It will lead to a blood-bath in the Punjab' (58).

15 Singh, (1966, 302–305) In conclusion, he wrote:

A student of Sikh affairs may indulge in speculation on the course of the two movements to which attention has been drawn in the preceding pages viz Sikh resistance to being absorbed by Hinduism and the movement for a Sikh state. The two are more intimately related to each other than is generally realised or admitted.

In the revised edition of his book, he felt satisfied with the formation of Punjabi-speaking state in 1966 as 'all one could ask reasonably in a secular India'.

16 Gill (1997, 138–139), wrote,

Unfortunately the very people who were responsible for the genesis of the tragedy in Punjab still have a vested interest in keeping these wounds alive; in reinforcing the image of the Sikhs as a victim community to provide a self-perpetuating justification for retaliatory violence; in recreating the ghetto mentality that will allow these leaders to consolidate their power over the Panth and the state

17 See for example an article by Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Arora in Kaur and Shourie (1984).

18 See for example Singh (2013), Badami (2006), Sandhu (2012), Singh 1995), Dhar (1996).

19 See Pettigrew (1992) for analysis of *Dhadi* tradition and commentary upon one song. Also see Pettigrew (1991, 1995) for a detailed analysis of militant groups' and some reflections upon the Sikhs by this major social anthropologist.

20 This and the subsequent quote is from Mahboob (1990).

21 Singh, Harbhajan (1990, 120).

22 See J. Singh (2006), Sekhon (1999). Also see Jodhka (1997).

23 See Kumar (1991), Mudgal (1995), Singh (2010) who pointed this out – though more studies are required.

24 Grewal (1994, 227). Also see Grewal (2005, 295–334)

25 By way of a model of new exploration of Indian democracy, see, Singh (2000). Also see contributions by Axel (2001), Mahmood (1996), Juergensmeyer (1988, 1993), Mehta (2010, 2013), Purewal (2000), Razavy (2006), Tatla (2004), Kalra and Nijhawan (2007), Fenech (2000), Gayer (2012), Deol (2000).

26 This is gratefully cited from an unpublished paper, 'Was there ever a Khalistan movement?' given at 'What's happening to Sikh ethno-nationalism?' workshop at the University of Birmingham, organized by Gurharpal Singh in 2009.

27 In a special issue of *Pacific Affairs* Oberoi, Jeffrey, Pettigrew, major published articles on the tragedy.

28 In North America various Sikh Studies chair holders are signalling the arrival of this new elite, with appropriate studies published or promised in the near future. See for example new publications by Pashaura Singh (Riverside), Gurinder S. Mann (Santa Barbara), Anne Murphy (UBC), Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (Michigan), Balbinder S. Bhogal (Hofstra) and Nirvikar Singh (Santa Cruz). While *Journal of Punjab Studies* was shifted to University of California: Santa Barbara a new journal *Sikh Formations* has explored issues more pertinent to Sikhs and Sikh Studies.

29 See Kaur (2002), Amnesty International (1991), Human Rights Watch (1994), Jaijee (1999), Ribeiro (1998) and Kumar's publications.

30 Kumar (2008, 76) cited the concept of genocide as formulated by Lemkin (1947) as:

In general genocide does not necessarily mean direct destruction of a people (with the exception of mass murder of all members of a people) but rather systematic and coordinated policies aiming at the destruction of the indispensable vital foundation of ethnic groups in order to annihilate these groups in themselves. Objectives in such a scheme could be the smashing of political and social institutions, of culture, language, national sentiment, of a people's religion or economic life, the destruction of personal security, freedom, health and dignity and finally the killing of members in such a group. Genocide is directed to an ethnic group as such. And action related to it is not directed to persons because of their individual characteristics, but rather their belonging to a specific ethnic group.

31 See Sekhon (1999) who examined social and economic background of some young men who joined militants.

32 Hetchter (1987, 170)

33 Its Minorities Sub-Committee rejected separate electorates by 26 votes to 3. Hukam Singh and four Muslims demanded that the Council of States and the House of People should be elected by proportional representation. For the House of People this was rejected. See Robinson (1966).

34 Jalal (1995)

35 Enloe (1973, 143)

36 O'Leary and Paul (1990) provide a further discussion of hegemonic and other measures of control over minorities.

37 Simeon (1994). For the definition of such a state in Southeast Asia, see Brown (1994), Singh (2000).

38 Also see Das (1995), and Nandy (1990).

39 See a discussion of different states in the world. Cliffe and Luckham (1999), Green and Ward (2004), Kirby (1997).

40 From 1983 onwards Punjab was placed under direct rule from Delhi, an Akali government led by Surjit Singh Barnala was dismissed after a year, then in 1992, a Congress government led by Beant Singh was constituted with elections boycotted by Akali Dal.

41 *The Spokesman*, August 17, 1981.

42 Singh 1960.

43 *The Spokesman*, August 29, 1951. Also see Sarhadi (1970), Nayar (1966, 1968)

44 *Raj karega Khalsa* (Khalsa shall rule) has been part of Sikh vocabulary since the eighteenth century. In contemporary Punjabi, *quam* is commonly used for 'nation' or 'community', along with *des* for 'the country'. While *des* may convey an idea of Punjab or refer to India, the word *quam* always referred to the Sikh community. See McLeod (1978)

45 Shiromani Akali Dal, *Anandpur Sahib Resolution* (1978), 1.

46 The 'martial races' idea was scrapped in 1949. In 1974, the Sikh army ratio was set at 2.5 percent, still above their portion of the population of just 2 percent. See Cohen (1988).

47 Joshi (1984), Chandan (n.d.), Singh and Purewal (2013). Sant Bhindranwale's rise and prominence in Akali politics remains an enigma. Called a saint by many, he was subsequently painted as a demonic figure by Indian official pronouncements. His presence in the Golden Temple was used as an excuse for army action. From 1982 onwards, he preached, through fiery language, religious orthodoxy, and blamed the Akali leaders for compromises. Official versions have branded him a terrorist who sent hit squads from the Golden Temple to murder his opponents. Yet while he was alive he was not charged with the heinous crimes that were attributed to him posthumously. For the Sikh youth who took up arms, he became a martyr.

48 Leaders of the Babbar Khalsa, the Khalistan Commando Force, the Khalistan Liberation Force, the Bhindranwale Tiger Force and several other groups were killed. Jaijee (1999), quoting from the 'Punjab Legislative Assembly Proceedings: Reply by Chief Minister to a Starred Question', lists a total of 41,684 rewards given to policemen between January 1991 and December 1992 for killing Sikh militants.

49 See studies by Smith (1981a, 1981b, 1983, 1986).

50 For few exceptions see: Ram (2002), Kaura (1999), Grewal (2004), Kaur (2008).

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